



Ancient Mysteries in Novel Wineskins
A bold new translation of the famous dialogue
between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3

Or: “Jesus and Nicodemus” *contextualized* into Egypto-Hellenic and Vedic Culture

With extensive commentary evidencing the link between the concept of being “born again from above” and the ancient Mysteries, arguably alluded to in the Platonic dialogues

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Part of my upcoming *Reviving the Platonic Academy* series

Other papers and presentations in this series:

The Nature of Plato’s Good Revealed: Platonic Theology and Its Relation to Christianity and Judaism:
The Case for Distinguishing between the Idea of the Good and the Good Itself

Front page illustration: Walking on Water, oil painting by Ivan Ivazovsky, c. 1888. Source: Wikimedia Commons

The profound *symbolism* inherent in the act of walking on water attributed to Jesus Christ, namely the overcoming and transcending of the Material World (c.f. John 16:33), would have been fairly evident to most educated ancients, since water, for obvious reasons, is an immemorial *symbol* of the everchanging, fluctuating substance of Matter.

– **Nous is the slave of no one, and the Lord of All, and naturally True and Free.**

Plato (paraphrase), *Laws* 875c–875d, c. 350 B.C.

Pertinent introductory quotes from the *Lawbook of Manu* (the *Manava Dharma Shastra* or *Manusmriti*)
Possibly begun by the Vedic Indian sage Bhrigu Maharishi around 2000 B.C.:

– **For in the knowledge and adoration of one GOD, which the Veda teaches,** all the rules of good conduct, *before-mentioned* in order, are fully comprised.

#87, p. 338, emphasis added

(C.f. Matthew 22:36–40)

– Equally perceiving **the supreme soul** in all beings and all beings in the supreme soul, **he sacrifices his own spirit by fixing it on the spirit of GOD, and approaches the nature of that sole divinity who shines by his own effulgence.**

#91, p. 338, emphasis added

– Such is the advantageous privilege of those who have **a double birth** from their natural mothers and from **the gayatri**, their spiritual mother, especially of a brahman; since **the twice-born man**, by performing this duty, but not otherwise, **may soon acquire endless felicity** [beatitude].

#93, p. 338, emphasis added

– But he must consider **the supreme omnipotent intelligence as the sovereign lord of them all**, *by whose energy alone they exist*; **a spirit**, *by no means the object of any sense*, which **can only be conceived by a mind** *wholly abstracted from matter, and as it were slumbering*; but which, for the purpose of assisting his meditation, he may imagine more subtile [subtle] than the finest conceivable essence, and **more bright than the purest gold.**

#122, p. 343, emphasis added

(The integrated gloss of Kulluka Bhatta has been rendered in *italics*, as in the original editions published by Sir William Jones, and also in *grey*, so as to make it plain that it is an addition to the ancient text allegedly composed by the Indian sage Bhrigu. As for the age of the composition, internal evidence, such as the mentioning of the great Saraswati River – a river which dried up and disappeared millennia ago – indicates that parts of it must be *at least* some 4,000 years old.)

Important note regarding the translation of John 3: The use of *italics*, when in a biblical “verse” (numbered verses do not exist in the original text, of course), and of *grey*, signifies that the word or phrase *italicized* is *not*, strictly speaking, part of the original, but a gloss or integrated commentary added by the translator, the undersigned, Edmund Schilvold. Brackets signify important editorial or explanatory notes, while longer remarks made by the translator regarding context and interpretation are, unsurprisingly, designated “Comment”.

Jesus and Nicodemus ♦ new light shed on the climactic nightly meeting

(3:1) Now, there was a *certain* man *among those belonging to the sect* of the Pharisees, Nicodemus was his name, *which means “Victorious among his people” in Greek* [“Hebrew” was a more or less dead language at the time of Christ, as Latin is now], *and he was an archon, that is, a ruler, of the Judeans* [“τῶν Ἰουδαίων”].

(3:2) He, this Nicodemus, came to him, Jesus, by night – *for Nicodemus was in the dark, as it were, and also feared criticism from his peers* – and said to him:

“Master, we realize that you have come as a teacher from God, for no one has the power to perform the *miraculous* signs you are performing unless God is with him.”

Comment: By itself, this utterance by Nicodemus could be taken either as a sincere admission *or* as a sly attempt to elicit a response from Jesus, so as to see what he would say of the relationship between him and the Divine. However, when seen in the context of the numerous conflicts and quarrels between Jesus and various Pharisees in both this and the other gospels, it becomes abundantly clear that the author of this passage, whoever he was, *could not possibly* have intended the above statement to be interpreted in an ordinary, straightforward manner, since the majority of both the Pharisees and the members of the Sanhedrin were *opposed* to the more extraordinary of the teachings of Jesus, according to all the gospel narratives (c.f. Matthew 23 and Luke 11:37–54, for example). Hence, the author – or authors – could not have meant the words “we realize” to be taken literally, at “face value”. Whether any of this accurately reflects *actual historical realities* is another question entirely.

(3:3) Jesus replied *to Nicodemus*: Amen, Amen, I tell you, no one possesses the power to behold the Kingdom of God, *which is the Kingdom of Heaven*, unless he be born *for a second time*, from *the* Above. [C.f. Matthew 5:8; John 8:23]

Comment: It is interesting to note that Jesus' reply would seem to indicate *a connection* between the gaining of the ability to perceive the Kingdom of God and the power (or powers) allowing one to

perform miraculous signs (since this reply is a response to what Nicodemus said in verse two concerning “miraculous signs”). In the Indian or Vedic religio-philosophical tradition, such supernatural powers, which are powers gained by way of spiritual practices like yoga (a Sanskrit/Sanskrit cognate of the English noun and verb yoke), have been a well-known phenomenon for millennia, and are often referred to as *Siddhis*. This is the context into which the miracles mentioned in the Gospels ought to be placed.

(3:4) Then Nicodemus said to him: “How can an old man possess the power to be born? Surely he is not able to enter into the womb of his mother again, and from thence be born?”

Comment: This part of the dialogue (verse four) seems rather implausible, and deliberately satirical, since it is extremely unlikely that an educated and highly placed Judean (a resident of Judea) like Nicodemus (to speak of “Jews” in a first century context, before the Destruction of the Temple (70 A.D.) and the Bar Kochva Revolt (132–135 A.D.), and without qualifications, is to engage in a rather misleading use of important terms), who is even bearing a Greek name, would not have been familiar with the ancient mystical doctrine of rebirth, which was repeatedly alluded to by Plato *some four centuries* before this conversation with Nicodemus allegedly took place, and which was likely an integral part of both the Greater Mysteries celebrated at Eleusis (a Greek name implying liberation or salvation), and of the exceedingly ancient mysteries that were likely still being carried out in Egypt and various other non-Greek locations in the centuries before Christ. While it appears quite possible that some of the Pharisees had never *experienced* any kind of initiation or rebirth *personally*, it is not believable that they had never even heard of such concepts, since the Judea of the first century (as well as the rest of the Levant) was very heavily influenced by both the Greek language and Greek spirituality and religious practices.

Hence, the inescapable conclusion is that Nicodemus is either a fictional character, at least in part, or that he, if he in fact existed as portrayed, deliberately feigned ignorance, in order to see what Jesus would say, and also to provoke a detailed and perhaps “self-incriminating” (in the eyes of some Pharisees) response.

(3:5) Jesus answered *Nicodemus*: Amen, Amen, I tell you, no one possesses the power to enter the Kingdom of God unless he be born *or regenerated* of Water and Spirit, *that is to say, unless he be washed in the Waters of Purification, and be set alight and illuminated by the Fire of the Holy Spirit, as all those properly initiated into the Mysteries have been.*

Comment: “of Water and Spirit” is “ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ Πνεύματος” in the Greek; “ex hydatos kai Pneumatos”.

(3:6) That which has been born of the Flesh (σάρξ; sarx), *that is to say, of the Carnal Passions of the Physical Body, is mere Flesh, and does not live on after death, and that which has been born of the Holy Spirit is indeed Spirit (πνεῦμά, pneuma), and is therefore endowed with Eternal Life.*

(3:7) Do not marvel at what I said to you, *Nicodemus*; *that* necessity demands that everyone be born *for a second time, from the Above.*

Comment: To “be born *for a second time, from the Above*” is “γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν” (gennethenai anawthen) here; c.f. original statement in verse three. As for the distinction here made by Christ between “sarx” and “pneuma”, “flesh” and “spirit”, this example of the acknowledgement of the existence of a supernatural (or rather “supramaterial”) element, which is only one of numerous such statements in the gospels (another example is Matthew 10:28), alone refutes the fairly widespread modern contention that “Christianity” holds, or ought to hold, that “mind” and “body” constitutes an inseparable “unity” – a contention which arises out of what one might call *materialistic monism* (an ideology which claims that there is *only one* primary substance or essence, and that it is material, or composed of atoms and molecules, and not spiritual), and which indirectly denies not only the vitally important concept of an Afterlife beyond this life and physical death (without which the popular foundation of ethics crumbles, and universal Justice is rendered impossible), but also the reality of and the ontological independence of a Supreme Deity, since it leaves no room for the spiritual or supernaturalist worldview which is now often disparagingly referred to by its opponents as “dualism”.

That which many of the academics of today like to style “dualism” is, however, the traditional outlook of not only Christianity, but also of all or most of the other significant religions of the world, and “dualism” is, in actuality, a misnomer (and a strawman), since none of the traditions accused of “dualism” by Modernity actually hold that there are *only* two fundamental substances, completely separated from each other and wholly unrelated. In the religio-philosophical system of Ancient Platonism, for instance, there are (I believe) at least *six major ontological “planes” or “levels” or differentiations*, as I came close to demonstrating in my master's thesis (Higher Being, Lower Being, Higher Becoming, Lower Becoming, as well as “Beyond-Being” and “Beyond-Becoming” or Non-Being) – and these are all “connected”. Some also see a *seventh*, which would be the integration of all these into the Just Whole or State of Oneness that lies at the heart of Plato's program, and which is the prerequisite for both the psychological and the political situation of True Kingship.

(3:8) The *Holy Spirit, like the wind*, breathes where it wishes; you hear its voice, *like the sound of the breeze*, but you do not see whence it comes, nor where it could lead you, *nor how it could overpower and inspire you*. So it is with all those born of the *Holy Spirit*; *they have all become like the wind among the reeds*.

Comment: The sentences now classed as “verse eight” have an elaborate dual meaning, which is clearly deliberate, and they actually constitute one long series of plays on words, a sort of sophisticated irony, which is far from always fully preserved in translations of the Koine Greek into other languages. The reason is that a word like πνεῦμα, which is here often translated into English as “wind”, can mean both *wind* and *spirit* and *breath* in Greek – much like the Greek word ἄνεμος (anemos), which is the probable origin of the Latin terms *anima* and *animus* (used by St. Augustine in his *De Trinitate* to signify soul or mind, for example).

As for “φωνήν” (φωνή; phawne), the word often translated as “sound”, it can also mean voice, for example. Moreover, the verb ὑπάγω (hupagawe) does not necessarily refer to the simple act of going, but has connotations having to do with the bringing of someone or something *under the power* of someone or something, and of *leading someone or something somewhere* (LSJ).

Only when the full, *dual or perhaps even triple* meaning of the first sentence is grasped does the final sentence make sense to the reader, for to view it as stating that all human beings that have been born of the Spirit become like the *ordinary* wind, or that they are not aware of the origin and the destination of a worldly breeze or gale, is of course to make the statement in question ludicrous and inane – it is only when one realizes what Jesus is *actually* portrayed as saying here, *namely that those that have been born or regenerated from the Above*, which is the same (I would argue) as saying from the Kingdom of Heaven, *have themselves become like the Great Spirit or Breath*, and have therefore become *spiritual beings*, “wind-beings”, as it were, capable not only of “coming” and of “going” as they wish (as Christ is repeatedly portrayed as doing, by the way), as far as this material world is concerned, but also of inspiring and guiding others.

The title of one of William Butler Yeats' famous poems, *The Wind Among The Reeds*, seemed like a perfect comment on this verse, since the *twice-born* or *reborn* or *initiated* are, in a sense, like the wind whispering in the rushes, for the twice-born are fully, truly *sentient* and *alive*, while the ignorant and largely non-spiritual “masses” (which, we ought never to forget, are collections of *individuals*, or at least of *potential* individuals) are like the dry and hollow reeds along the lakes, being constantly moved hither and thither, without even understanding why they are being moved, or by what force.

That does not necessarily mean that there is no hope for any of the individuals making up those more or less ignorant masses, however – on the contrary, the very concept of Hope, in the sense of a goal or destiny or state transcending all the more or less petty concerns of this material world, in which everything is always in a state of being generated or passing away (as Plato would say), and of which nothing will eventually remain (because Time or Chronos inevitably devours his metaphorical children), *is predicated on the Reality of a Spiritual Realm “behind” or “beyond” this material one* (because Modern Science and Traditional Religion agree that this present world is in a state of flux, and that it will eventually be completely destroyed).

All the metaphorical “reed” needs to start doing in order to commence its transformation is to begin listening intently to the exceedingly subtle but very real “voice” of the “wind”. However, until it chooses to do so, and embarks on the Great Journey of Regeneration, the part of this earthly Pilgrimage where the Pilgrim (aided by the Divine, of course) initiates the journey home, as St. Augustine might

have put it, it is *spiritually dead*, and that is why one of the many pithy and ironic and somewhat harsh aphorisms attributed to Christ in the gospels is that of “Follow me, and leave the [spiritually] dead to bury their dead!” (Matthew 8:22, c.f. Luke 9:60, and also John 12:24–25, where Christ says that “The one loving his [worldly] life loses it, and the one detesting his life in this world will preserve it into Life Eternal”).

Incidentally, the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven is, of course, an Eternal or Spiritual Realm (c.f. Luke 17:20–21, John 8:36, for example), as is quite evident when all the sayings of Christ are taken as a whole, and seen in their proper context, and in light of the ancient teachings, and my own view, based on my research (such as that mentioned in my master's thesis, and in my paper on the Nature of the Good), is that this Kingdom of Heaven is more or less identical to the Platonic Realm of Higher Being, the Upper Section of the Realm of the Noetic, which Plato, fittingly, often refers to as the Above, or “that which is (truly) above” (as in the *Republic*; c.f. *Politeia* 489c, 516a, 517b, 517d, 529a, 533d, 584e, 586a), and in fact also correlates with True Kingship and True “Philosopherhood”, whether internal or external, as well as with the gaining of Objective Knowledge, which is not worldly agglomerations of “facts”, but luminous, otherworldly *Wisdom*. (C.f. Plato's *Politeia*, and my own master's thesis, published in 2020)

(3:9) Nicodemus answered, saying to Him: How come that these things are the way *you say* they are?

(3:10) Jesus answered: You are the teacher of Israel [obviously meaning *one* such teacher, not the only one], and yet you are not aware of this *mystery that I have just referred to? How come that you have never been initiated?*

(3:11) Amen, Amen, I tell you, we [a peculiar choice of words; who are “**we**” here?] speak of what we have seen, and bear witness to what we have beheld, and still you [not Nicodemus specifically, but an unspecified collection of several individuals] do not accept our testimony.

Comment: It is curious (to say the least) that Christ is here depicted as saying “Amen, amen” for *the third time* in this very short dialogue. While ἀμὴν is conventionally translated into English as “verily” or “truly” or “assuredly”, there is an alternative and very different interpretation of the term “amen” which might be worth some consideration, namely that it is a subtle or covert reference to the ancient Egyptian theological concept of the “Amen-Ra”, the *Hidden* or (to the world) *Invisible* Sun. (C.f. Budge, 2012, *kindle locations* 6523, 6711, 6729, 6795, 6802, 6846)

It could of course be a coincidence that Hebrew or Aramaic happened to have a word at the time Christ is supposed to have lived which was *completely identical* to a vitally important Egyptian one, and it is of course possible that the former term emerged independently of the latter (even though we know “Hebrew” to have been heavily influenced by Egyptian, as Sir Alan Gardiner pointed out a hundred years ago), but when we take into account the fact that Christ is described as *sunlike* (c.f. Matthew 5:44–5:45; 17:1–2; 26:34; 26:74–75), and that careful analysis of the Gospels reveals that the Son or Eternal Word or Image occupies a position in the metaphysical schema more or less identical to that of Plato's indubitably *solar* Idea of the Good, which Plato also celebrates as Kyria, and which is strikingly similar, conceptually speaking, to both the Egyptian Amen-Ra and the Vedic Gayatri (to which the famous Gayatri Mantra mentioned in the *Lawbook of Manu* refers), it *stretches credulity* to flatly *deny* that Jesus' repeated use of “amen, amen” is not merely an innocent affirmation, but also a reference to – and possibly an invocation of – the central *Spiritual* Sun of that great and marvellous and very old civilization just to the south of the tiny mountain stronghold of Judea (to which Typhon or Seth reportedly fled from Egypt, according to Plutarch's *Isis and Osiris*, Sec. 31) and the little “lake district” of Galilee – those two small regions which oftentimes in the past have been described in literature almost as if they were islands of high culture and sublime monotheism in a sea of uncouth barbarians and stupid idol worshippers, when the truth restored to us by the great pioneering European historians and archeologists of the 1800s is that they were rather insignificant provinces perpetually nestled between or lodged within the borders of several great civilizations, the identity of which depends on the century selected, of course, but examples of which are the Indo-European empire of the Hittites of Anatolia, now Turkey, to the north, the Babylonian empire of Mesopotamia to the east, the wonderfully sophisticated land of Egypt to the south and the Mediterranean trading empire of the sea-going Phoenicians – a Semitic people closely related to and almost indistinguishable from the ethnic entity now known as “Israelites” as far as the historical record is concerned – to the northwest. From these

and other ancient civilizations in the same region, such as Sumer and Akkad, whose *very existence* was largely *forgotten* until Napoleonic, Victorian and Prussian scientists and adventurers began excavating the ruins of their cities and the records of their achievements, the Israelites and their brethren got most of the material now incorporated, in a somewhat altered form, into books like Genesis, as well as most of their customs and institutions and beliefs (c.f. Smith, 1876, Annus, 2010, Budge, 2012). The “exceptionalism” and “manifest destiny” being justified with references to carefully selected passages in the Tanakh and other ancient texts, as well as the depreciation of the Egypt of the Pharaohs as a pit of carnality and idol worship, and of late Hellenic cultural influence as a scourge to be avoided, therefore rests on rather questionable conceptual foundations, to put it mildly.

A “disconnect” in the text now follows (the conjunction “if” does not make sense in this place English, nor does the term “earthly”)

(3:12) If, *now that* I have told you of the *comparatively* worldly [“τὰ ἐπίγεια”], *that is, of that which might take place upon Earth*, and you [Nicodemus] are not convinced, then how will you *be able to believe me* if I tell you of the *truly* heavenly [“τὰ ἐπουράνια”], *that is, of that which is in Heaven?*

Comment: This is a strange sentence, especially if we take into consideration the passages preceding it, as we indeed must. To have the sentence commence only with the conjunction “if”, as most English translations do, results in a string of words that makes little sense. “If” indicates doubt, but there can be no doubt that Jesus, according to the narrative, has in fact told Nicodemus of that which the sentence tries to refer to as “the worldly” or “the earthly” (“τὰ ἐπίγεια”), which, in light of the context, can only be the Second Birth, the birth from the Above, by way of purification and an encounter with the Holy Spirit, mentioned earlier – even though “τὰ ἐπίγεια” is a *curious* choice of words if the objective is to

make a reference to the Second Birth, which is of *a spiritual*, and *not* an earthly, nature.

A looser, more “lenient” translation, rendering “τὰ ἐπίγεια” as “that which might take place upon Earth”, *even though* it has a spiritual quality, would seem to be the best solution. As for “τὰ ἐπουράνια” (ta ep'ourania), literally “the above-heavenly” or “in-heavenly”, it seems to have connotations of “divine”, and to refer to that which is actually *in* Heaven itself, or “above” the ordinary, visible heaven (LSJ), and is of course used to create the rhetorical effect of a contrast to “τὰ ἐπίγεια” in the first part of the sentence.

Interestingly, the meaning of the adjective ἐπουράνιος (ep'ouranios) would appear to approximate very closely to that of ὑπερουράνιος (hyperouranios), famously employed by Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (247c), to describe a “Heaven of Heavens”.

(3:13) And no one ever ascended up into Heaven, unless [“εἰ μὴ”] *he or she* (“the”/“that one”?) [“ὅ”] *first* came down out of Heaven, *and that includes* the Son of Man [“who is in Heaven” is believed to be a later gloss or addition].

Comment: The ordinary and traditional translation of this sentence, which consists of yet another rather ambiguous string of Greek phrases, results in another nonsensical statement, since Jesus is (in effect) made to say that *no one* had attained to heavenly bliss or an afterlife in Heaven at the time this was uttered. But that can hardly be the correct interpretation of these words, since it would come into conflict with numerous statements concerning “ascension” in the Old Testament, such as the one concerning Enoch in Genesis 5:24 (“And Enoch walked with the Elohim, and he was not, for Elohim took him.”) and the visions described in the Book of Ezekiel (a book which Jesus is portrayed as repeatedly alluding to, by the way) – unless Jesus is implying that the Heavenly Realm spoken of here is not the same as the one hinted at in the Tanakh. Moreover, what has been said earlier *in this very conversation* between Jesus and Nicodemus *presupposes a fairly widely distributed knowledge of the doctrine of spiritual rebirth* (c.f. verse ten) preceeding this dialectical exchange, and if such knowledge existed before Jesus's own lifetime, as it clearly did, and that knowledge was put into practice, as it surely was, then many a sage and many a godly human being must have “ascended into Heaven” before Jesus's time, since Jesus himself correlates such spiritual rebirth with the gaining of the power to

“enter” the Kingdom of God (c.f. verse five), which is evidently the same as “ascending” into the Kingdom of Heaven.

My equating of the Kingdom of God with a spiritual Kingdom of Heaven ought not to be controversial at all, for (as already pointed out on page seven) statements elsewhere in the Gospels make this identity abundantly clear – “Blessed are the Pure in Heart, for they shall contemplate God.” (Matthew 5:8), and “(...) The Kingdom of God comes not with visual senseimpressions [“μετὰ παρατηρήσεως”], nor will they say 'Look here' or 'Look there', for the Kingdom of God is **within you!**” (Luke 17:20–21, emphasis added) are two salient examples of these.

Incidentally, the Greek preposition sometimes misleadingly translated as “in the midst of” or “among you”, “ἐντὸς” (entos), does *not* mean “in the midst of” or “among you” at all, but signifies “within” or “inside of”, and why it is sometimes “translated” in one of the two former ways only becomes comprehensible when one realizes that there exists a desire (conscious in some and unconscious in others, undoubtedly) to *obscure* the meaning of revealing verses such as this one, so as to facilitate a dishonest or disingenuous “materialization” or “degradation” of the authentic Christian doctrine, and an ideologically or politically motivated *merger* or *confounding* (in the minds of the deceived) of the genuine doctrine of the Kingdom of Heaven with the notion of a *pseudo-religious, worldly Utopia* – a notion demonstrated by the numerous and disastrous “experiments” with and of Communism over the course of the twentieth century to be exceedingly dangerous, and to *always* lead to the shedding of very large quantities of *innocent blood*.

In sum, this new translation of mine, which I will admit is a somewhat bold one, not only creates a sentence which *actually makes sense*, both by itself and in the religio-philosophical context in which it is found, but attributes to either Jesus or the author of the Gospel of John a statement which would appear to be affirmative of the doctrine of metempsychosis or reincarnation (c.f. also John 1:21; John 9:2) – a doctrine which was certainly a prominent part of the profoundly *Hellenic* and Indo-European environment in which both the Galileans and the Judeans of the Levant of the first century A.D. found themselves, and which was probably also taught as a truth in the Mesopotamian-Chaldean and Egypto-Israelite mystical traditions into which Jesus may well have been initiated, and from which mystical works like the *Zohar* eventually emerged (it is not at all believable that the immensely complex system

now recorded on its pages was created “out of whole cloth” in the late medieval, as some scholars have claimed).

Moreover, this statement fits very well with the Platonic doctrine of the eternal and immortal nature of the Human Soul – that Soul must “come down out of Heaven”, i.e. incarnate into (be connected to in some way) a physical body, before it may “ascend” back “up into Heaven” (rediscover its True Nature and achieve Union or “Marriage” with the Divine), and since the similarities between many of the statements attributed to Socrates by Plato and those attributed to Jesus Christ by the gospels are exceedingly great (the “Turn the Other Cheek” concept – the doctrine that it is better to suffer than to commit violence and injustice – is found *fully developed* in Plato's *Georgias* (527c–527d is only the final and most revealing of three such passages in that dialogue), and the “Good Shepherd” is described in Plato's *Statesman* (in words curiously similar to those of John – c.f. *Statesman* 271e, 274e–275b, John 10), to mention only two of the many striking instances that could be cited), and *since* this can only mean (1) that the gospels are in fact largely Platonic in nature, *or* (2) that both the Canonical Gospels and the philosophy now styled “Platonism” arose out of a common human or divine source, *it is not unreasonable to suspect* that the proposition found in verse thirteen is in fact a subtle reference to the “preexistence” of the Soul.

Alternatively, the verse could be interpreted not as a reference to reincarnation, but to the process of rebirth or regeneration elaborated on earlier in the dialogue (which would certainly allow for a good match with the context) – no one has the power to “ascend into Heaven”, i.e. to attain to a lasting vision of the Supreme Deity (the *Beatific Vision* of the medieval Christian churches and their mystics), unless he or she has first “come down out of Heaven”, i.e. has first been regenerated from the Above, by the Mystical Rebirth which Socrates may well have had in mind when he styled himself a “midwife”, and called his art “midwifery” (c.f. the *Theaetetus*).

(3:14) And just as Moses elevated [“ὑψωσεν”] the Serpent [ὁ ὄφις] [on a pole/standard] in the desert, so it behooves [is necessary for] the Son of Man to be elevated [“ὑψωθῆναι”] [on a pole/standard],

(3:15) so that everyone believing in him may possess Eternal Life [or rather “Life for All the Ages”; Life “Agelasting”, “ζωὴν αἰώνιον”].

(C.f. Numbers 21:5–9; LXX: Psalm 149:6: “αἱ ὑψώσεις τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ λάρυγγι αὐτῶν καὶ ῥομφαῖαι δίστομοι ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῶν”)

(The word usually translated as “pole” is the Hebrew “nes” (נֶסֶף), which can also mean “standard”, “banner”, “ensign” or “signal”.) See: <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5251.htm>

Comment: These sentences raise a number of important questions. In the first place, they do not fit very well with the above dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus on the Second or Spiritual Birth (and the “Twice-Born”, as the “regenerated” are called in the Indian tradition) and the Nature of the Holy Spirit, and they appear to continue the disconnect in the text which I would say begins with verse twelve. There is a “jump” from one subject to another, unless there are connections between John 3:1–11 and the subsequent verses which are not readily apparent to the contemporary reader, and which no traditional translations I am aware of take into account.

In the second place, it is not at all clear what Moses' alleged “elevating” or raising up or glorifying of the serpent signifies, nor is it in any way plain why Jesus is portrayed as referring to that event here, and as saying that *he* (*if* “the Son of Man” – a term which invokes thoughts of “the Heavenly Man” of Esoteric Judaism, the Adam Kadmon, in those familiar with the Zohar – does indeed refer to him *alone*, for the prophet Ezekiel is *also* called “Son of Man”, or rather “Son of Adam”, “בֶּן-אָדָם”) must be elevated on a pole or standard in a manner similar to how the serpent was elevated on a pole or standard by Moses. (Incidentally, the “Son of Adam” is also, of course, if we consider Genesis 5, Seth – and the identity between that name of an alleged Israelite “patriarch” and the foremost deity of the Hyksos rulers of Avaris or Rameses is perhaps not coincidental.)

In the third place, such a lifting up, as some translations say, of the serpent – called both a seraph (a fiery or poisonous serpent) and a nachash (a serpent) in the original text – seems rather nonsensical in a biblical context, at least on the face of it, since the serpent is often associated with evil (but not always or exclusively, c.f. Matthew 10:16: “(...) become, therefore, [as] wise as the serpents (...),” and with

“the adversary”, in the Israelite and Christian traditions.

Having pondered this conundrum for a while, I have arrived at the following rather radical *hypothesis*:

On one level, the exoteric, the elevation or glorification signifies *the instituting of belief in or adoption of a new god*, and on another level, the esoteric, it symbolizes *the individual, inner, spiritual process of the “raising” of that which in the eastern, yogic traditions is often styled the Kundalini* (a phenomenon which is probably not infrequently experienced during deep meditation and contemplation, and which is often accompanied by a kind of psychological and godly ecstasy).

In other words, the “raising” of the snake or seraph or nahash or ophis signifies, in the case of Moses, the adoption of YHWH, who, as we shall see later on, is a sort of “serpent god”, as the new deity of the Israelites, an interpretation which would make sense, considering the Exodus narrative, and, on a deeper level, something like the healing resulting from the yogic practice of the raising of the Kundalini.

Moreover, in the case of Christ, it also signifies the acceptance of a new deity, but this time it is not YHWH that is to be worshipped, but Christ, the Eternal Word (Plato's Luminous Idea or First Emanation of the Good Itself, as I would argue) of the wholly Unknowable First “Father” or First Principle – both of whom exist on a metaphysical level surpassing that of the creator-god YHWH, who is actually one of the Elohim or Planetary Angels, and the god of the Israelites alone, and not of other nations or ethnic groups. (C.f. Deuteronomy 32:8–9: “When the Highest [God] (Elion/Elyon) divided their possessions, when He separated the nations, the Sons of Adam, he set the boundaries according to the number of the Sons of Elohim [“Sons of Israel”, the expression used in the standard text, appears to be a late, Masoretic modification, employed out of a desire to avoid the older and rather revealing term, but was perhaps seen as acceptable since the *number* in question was in both cases believed to be twelve], for the portion of YHWH is his people, and the band of Jacob is his inheritance.”

As this unusually literal translation of the Hebrew indicates, YHWH is not here thought of as the Highest Deity, but is subject to the commands of Elyon, who is the Most High, and who assigns peoples or nations to the various lesser gods – and YHWH is here conceived of as one of these lesser

deities, and one of the Sons of Elohim. Some versions of the LXX say “Sons of God”, “υιων θεου”, while one Dead Sea Scroll fragment says “Sons of El” and another “Sons of Elohim”, as Michael Heiser (2001) has shown. See also Isaiah 14:12–14, which denounces the arrogance of the Shining One, whose fatal ambition it is to become like the Most High God, Elyon.)

As for the esoteric level, there are obvious and amazing similarities between the Christ of the Gospels and the famous Greek God of Healing, Asclepius or Ophiuchus – a god is often depicted as carrying a staff with a serpent coiled around it, a symbol which might have its origin in the wonderful ecstatic experience of energy “coiling around” or “rushing up along” the spinal cord and into the brain during the altered states of consciousness achieved by way of contemplation or noesis.

Like Christ, Asclepius is a divine healer of the sick, a raiser of the dead, and is closely associated with the cock or rooster. Interestingly, the rooster crows just as Christ is betrayed, and in Plato's *Phaedo*, the dying Socrates implores his friends to sacrifice a rooster to Asclepius. Hence, it is fairly plain that Christ is not only a kind of “Galilean Socrates” (as the countless “points of contact” between the Gospels and the Platonic dialogues amply demonstrate), but also a “Galilean Asclepius”, whatever the implications of that may be.

Finally, there may be an even more arcane and less obvious plane of signification embedded in these verses – one which only recently began to appear before my own inner eye. It is this: We know that the serpent was sometimes used as *a symbol* of initiation and rebirth, since it occasionally sheds its own skin and appears to be “born anew”, and even as a symbol of the initiate as a person, and we also know, or rather suspect, that a non-lethal “crucifixion” or cruciform posture was employed during the process of initiation into at least some of the ancient Mysteries. The masses of archeological discoveries made over the course of the last few centuries have certainly made it abundantly clear that the cross, in one form or another, was in use as a symbol in both Egypt, Europe and Asia millennia before the crucifixion of Christ allegedly took place in Palestine.

Hence, if the term “Son of Man”, which is actually “ben adam”, “son of adam” in Ezekiel (as in verse 12:2 and 12:9), is taken as a generic term meaning “serpent” or initiate (son of the Heavenly and Divine Adam?) then we may, and hopefully not unjustifiedly, come to glimpse a whole new mental

vista by way of the words in 3:14 and 3:15 – just as the Israelites led by Moses had to be “crucified” or initiated or “reborn” in order to be saved, *so the candidate for initiation Christ seems to have in mind in John 3:3 and 3:5* must be “crucified” or initiated or “reborn” in order to gain Eternal or “Age-lasting” Life for himself (or herself) and those who choose to “believe in” or rather *follow the guidance of* such “twice-born” and accomplished spiritual gurus.

If this be a valid interpretation, we have at last recovered the unfamiliar reasoning underlying this *seemingly* bizarre verse in the Gospel of John – the Son of Man, whether Christ or someone else, *the one who is a Son of Man*, because he is *a Son of Adam*, and who is a serpent, metaphorically speaking, or rather *a serpent-in-the-making*, must be “lifted up” or “crucified” because it is the way to initiation, and because mystical initiation is, or rather culminates in, the Second Birth, the metaphorical way, or rather “the narrow gate” (which was narrow indeed if we consider the Egyptian pyramids of Giza), leading to the contemplation of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the gaining of the ability to perform miracles, which was what this strikingly Platonic little dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus began with.

One last interpretative possibility should be mentioned. The snake or serpent or scaly (fish-like) animal, while sometimes representing Divine Wisdom, as in ancient Egypt and India and China, or the Initiate, as in ancient Mesopotamia (c.f. the curious legends and depictions of Oannes, the Divine Teacher from the sea, whose designation just so happens to closely resemble that of “John” or “Yawannes” (Ἰωάννης)), was *also*, under some circumstances, a symbol of Seth, the ancient Egyptian deity of the desert, and of chaos and destruction, known to the Hellenes as Typhon. Now, this depiction of Seth as a serpent or dragon was styled Apep or Apophis, and took the form of a giant snake, endangering the life of the sun (Re or Ra). Interestingly, one of the Hyksos rulers of Avaris, a large city in the eastern part of the Nile Delta, associated with the cult of Seth, and the same conurbation which the Book of Exodus calls Rameses, carried the name Apophis (Bietak, 1996, p. 64–65; *Papyrus Sallier*), and the Hellenes appear to have associated Typhon with the event known to us today as the Exodus (*Plut. Isis and Osiris* Sec. 31), which is said to have begun at Rameses (Exodus 12:37). But Seth was also portrayed by the Egyptians, for metaphorical purposes, of course, as what is believed to be a presently unidentified four-legged creature called the “Seth-animal”, which was characterized by its long, upright ears, and by its peculiar and narrow snout, and which therefore bore some resemblance to the donkey, and in some

ways also the pig, and it does not seem *entirely unreasonable* to suspect that the prohibition on swine-flesh, and of the strikingly high status granted to the donkey in Exodus 13:11–16, and of the characterization of the Israelites as “stiff-necked” (as in Exodus 32:9), have their origin in the cult of Seth – and the same might be true of the importance attached to the red heifer, since Seth was also connected with a certain tinge of red.

Now, this ancient conception of Seth as a monstrous snake, representing negative spiritual qualities like darkness and desolation and dissolution, could be seen as having some bearing on the raising of the snake on the pole, since that to us mysterious act, when viewed in light of the cult of Seth, could be seen as indicating either the elevation of or the crucifixion and overcoming of that fearsome deity. Just as the riding of a donkey could be viewed as symbolizing *either* the identification with or the taming of the donkey-headed god of the night, the act attributed to Moses, and referred to in the Gospel of John, is inherently ambiguous. What we can certainly say that it is *not* is transparent or unimportant – to do so is to ignore the immensely rich “tapestry” of connotations and legends associated with the serpent by the ancients.

Moreover, one interpretation or one level of understanding does not at all exclude others. The more educated of the people of the distant past were, in many cases, consummate masters of complex thinking, as becomes evident once their literature is actually read and studied and comprehended, and also of the art of encoding such thinking into myths and allegories, and a single act or narrative could be invested by them with both a literal, a moral, a historical, a theological, a cosmological, a numerical and a theurgical significance, for example. People and places they did not want to mention outrightly are nevertheless talked about by way of similar people and places of different epochs, in a manner similar to how Plutarch compares exceptional lives, seemingly absurd stories were composed with reference to hidden knowledge, gaps and contradictions were purposely introduced so as to induce the more intelligent to seek out the truth, bits and pieces of essential information were scattered like needles in verbal heystacks, so as to prevent the impatient and impetuous from ever collecting them all together, and so on and so forth. The constantly emerging ancient Egyptian corpus of religious texts, the Vedic literature of India, the sacred texts of Persia, the Mesopotamian literature rescued from decaying cuneiform tablets, the famous dialogues of Plato – *each of these and many more* could easily be made the sole subject of a lifetime of studies and considerations, and any modern claiming to have

understood in full extensive bodies of ancient literature such as these, has probably not understood much at all.

Christmas – a “reenactment” of the process of initiation into the Mysteries, modelled on the ancient Orphic way of encoding metaphysical truths into allegories

On the basis of all that I have mentioned in this essay, I would assert that it is highly likely that the rituals and the symbolism of the ancient Mysteries, and particularly those of the Eleusinian Mysteries, hold the proverbial keys to the gaining of a real understanding of not only Jesus' enigmatic and much-misunderstood response to Nicodemus, but also of the gospel narratives in general, and even of the symbolism and the rituals of the Christian Churches.

Christmas, for example, begins with the period of Advent, during which the observant Christian is patiently waiting for the birth of the Divine Child – a rather obvious reference (once seen) to the Divine Child of Mystical Rebirth, which is *always* “born” by way of “immaculate conception”, of course, since the process is purely spiritual, and by the Virgin Mary, a “reimagining” of the Vedic Aditi and Plato's Kyria, and the devout follower of Christ will very often be lighting *purple* candles, and purple is the color of a nascent flame, the flame of rekindling or reawakening, as Plato would put it, and also the traditional color of Kingship and Divine Authority.

It was not only initiates who wore the prohibitively expensive dye of purple, but also Roman Emperors, for example, and the color remains one of the notable emblems of kings and bishops even in our Modern Age, although very few persons would be able to tell you *why* – it is a symbol which takes us right back to the nearly forgotten concept of the Initiated and Truly Divine Monarch (dreamed of by Socrates and Plato), who would be in constant inner communion with the Deity, and whose rule would never fail to be benign and just, and of definite benefit to his fortunate subjects, since he would be receiving a continual river of Wisdom or Living Water directly from the Great Spiritual Heights of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Quite appropriately, the reenactment in the external world of the symbolic ritual of Christmas reaches its climax with the Nativity, when the Son of God, who is also the *Sun* of God, not in a worldly sense, but in a mystical sense, is fully developed, and candles of the highly significant colors of white and red, symbolizing purity and fire, purification and initiation, begin to illuminate the Darkness of the Night, or the Ignorance of this Material World.

For good measure, so to speak (the Perfect or Divine Measure is a Platonic concept, and is also found in ancient Egyptian thought, under the name Maat), the ritual is held at the very time when the sun of the outer world gains its first “victory” over winter, an event which was seen as referring to the *very real victory* of the Inner Sun or Good over the Inner Darkness or Lack of Knowledge, and as marking the commencement of not only a new year on Earth, but of a new life – the Life which is the beginning of Eternal Life.

Hence, the inescapable conclusion is that the entire Christian World is celebrating initiation every year in December, and every time the gospel narrative is remembered, mostly without realizing it.

That realization ought not to lead to anger and resentment, nor to attempts to return the religion to an “unadulterated”, purely native or Israelite state which never actually existed in reality, but to a new *appreciation* of and an open-hearted *celebration* of the foremost *actual* foundation of Christianity. One foundation, the scriptural one, has largely crumbled (due to two centuries of Higher Criticism and momentous archaeological discoveries), but the Stone which the Builders rejected (Matthew 21:33–46) may still be retained and adored.

Addendum

Plato on “Baptism”, or Purification and Transformation

429c–429d according to the Allan Bloom translation:

“Don't you know,” I [Socrates] said, “that the dyers, when they want to **dye [or bathe] wool purple [the color symbolizing Kingship]**, first choose from all the colors the single nature belonging to **white [the color symbolizing Purity]** things; then they **prepare it beforehand** and care for it with no little preparation so that it will most receive the color; and it is only then that they dye? And if a thing is dyed in this way, it becomes colorfast, and washing either without lyes or with lyes can't take away its color. But those things that are not so dyed – whether one dyes other colors or this one without preparatory care – you know what they become like.” (Emphasis added)

429c–429d according to the Benjamin Jowett translation:

“You know, I [Socrates] said, that dyers, when they want to dye wool for making **the true sea-purple**, begin by selecting their **white color** first; this they **prepare** and dress with much care and pains, in order that the white ground may take the purple hue in full perfection. The dyeing then proceeds; and whatever is dyed in this manner becomes a fast color, and no washing either with lyes or without them can take away the bloom. But, when the ground has not been duly prepared, you will have noticed how poor is the look either of purple or of any other color.” (Emphasis added)

429c–429d according to the Paul Shorey Translation:

“You are aware that dyers when they wish to dye wool so as to hold **the purple hue** begin by selecting from the many colors there be the one nature of **the white** and then give it **a careful preparatory**

treatment so that it will take the hue in the best way, and after the treatment, then and then only, dip it in the dye. And things that are dyed by this process become fast-colored and washing either with or without lyes cannot take away the sheen of their hues. But otherwise you know what happens to them, whether anyone dips other colors or even these without the preparatory treatment.” (Emphasis added)

Plato's Beautiful Description of Nous, “the Lord of All”

Plato, *Laws*, 875c–875d, according to the Benjamin Jowett translation:

“For if a man were born so divinely gifted that he could naturally apprehend the truth, he would have no need of laws to rule over him; for **there is no law or order which is above knowledge** [this will seem a strange statement unless one understands that Plato has Episteme, or Divine, Truly Objective and Flawless Knowledge, obtained by way of Noesis, in mind], **nor can mind [Nous], without impiety, be deemed the subject or slave [doulos] of any man, but rather the lord [archonta] of all. I speak of mind [Nous], true and free, and in harmony with nature [or: which, according to its Nature, is indeed True and Free].**” (Emphasis added)

Plato, *Laws*, 875c–875d, according to the R. G. Bury translation:

“Yet if ever there should arise a man competent by nature and by a birthright of divine grace [what in the world is the translator basing this phrase on?] to assume such an office, he would have no need of rulers over him; for **no law or ordinance is mightier than Knowledge, nor is it right for Reason [Nous] to be subject or in thrall to anything, but to be lord of all things, if it is really true to its name and free in its inner nature.**” (Emphasis added)

New translation by the undersigned, based on the Benjamin Jowett one:

“If someone, however, **some day**, were to be born according to **Divine Destiny** (θεία μοίρα; theia moira), and thus come equipped with a sufficiently Powerful (Able) Nature, such a human being would have no need of laws to rule over him, for there is no law or order above **Episteme**, *or Flawless, Divine, Objective Knowledge*, nor may **Nous** be deemed the servant or slave of anyone, since it answers to no one, and is in fact **the Lord of All** (ἀλλὰ πάντων ἄρχοντα εἶναι), for Nous, if in accordance with its Nature, is indeed both True and Free.”

(C.f. *Politeia* 499b–499c; “The Coming of the Platonic Messiah”, as I like to style it)

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